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SECRETS OF WRITING REVEALED AT LAST

-- for billy collins

It was raining in Arcadia.
I sat in the car waiting for the free race,
writing at a poem and reading Henry James.
The heater whispered like the skirts
of his heroines and those sentences
were still measured by the furlong
but I didn't mind, not like I used to.
Did this mean I could handle my mid-life crisis
in the library and skip therapy and motorcycles?

I worked on the poem some more (it turned out
to be this one) but it wouldn't jell so I
watched the stands exhale nine thousand fans
each in his new, free, yellow hat: a host
of golden daffodils. In the back seat
Wordsworth introduced himself to Henry. Whew!
But I played it cool, content to listen
as they chatted about writing. Then one
of them tapped me on the shoulder: "Look,
Ronald, we know you need to finish this poem,
and we can't leave until you do. It's one
of the rules of inspiration. But we also
want you to bet on Past Masters at 40-1.
So why not just borrow some lines from one
of your friends. We all did, you know."

I checked my program: 40-1. I checked
my watch: almost post time. "Billy wouldn't
mind," I said dashing for the windows.

And that is why my family
today
is so enormously wealthy.